

Dracula as a Foretelling of WWI

MARCH 11, 2011



Editor's Introduction

We have long been fascinated with the connection between monsters and our underlying fears. Jerome Cohen's 1996 book *Monster Theory* looks at horror stories as a sort of Rorschach test for the culture as a whole. If we look carefully, we can see in them our fears and anxieties about ourselves. According to this theory, each monster is specific to a particular time: *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* grew out of the 1950's fear of Communism, for example, and the recent spate of virus-driven zombies can be seen as a metaphor for AIDS (the 'living dead').

In this provocative article, Ph.D. candidate Genesea Carter argues that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can be read as a premonition of World War One. Carter sees the novel's depiction of a siege of vampirism descending on England as a foreshadowing of the destruction that would soon befall England when her young men encountered the terrible death dealt by modern warfare. The very scenario which frightened readers of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel – that a monstrous foreign entity (from the Austro-Hungarian Empire) invades innocent England using unforeseen, forbidden tactics to slaughter her citizens – came horrifyingly true less than two decades later. Dracula's blood-drinking and attack on unsuspecting women and children can be paralleled to Germany's poison-gas and machine-gun attacks upon defenseless villagers. Just as Dracula rabidly craved blood, so did Germany crave imperial expansion.

“The blood-dimmed tide is loosed”: *Dracula* as Prophetic Foretelling of WWI and Germany's Assault on England

by Genesea M. Carter

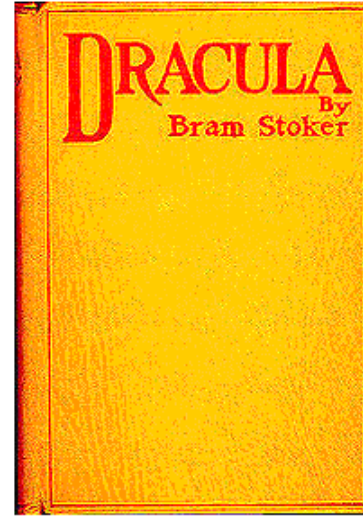
*The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;*

*The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

*Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.*

— W.B. Yeats' "The Second Coming," lines 5-10

With the 1897 publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the English were exposed to a terrifying Gothic novel that expressed the fears of the age: Questions of invasion, identity, and war were entangled in a dramatic story about vampires feeding on women and children in London. I will argue in this paper that the novel drew much of its power from Stoker's clever exploitation of existing fears within British society – specifically, the fear of a German invasion and a cataclysmic war.



The *Dracula* story begins with Jonathan Harker, a London solicitor, who travels to Transylvania to finalize a real estate purchase. Carfax Abbey, an estate near Purfleet, is being purchased by Count Dracula, a Transylvanian noble. After spending a few days at Count Dracula's castle, Harker becomes Dracula's prisoner, and, subsequently, discovers Dracula is undead, a supernatural creature who scales down his castle walls at night to feed on children. Harker escapes back to London, and Dracula makes plans to ship himself and fifty boxes of earth (presumably the homes of other vampires) to England, through the port of Whitby. After Dracula's arrival at Carfax Abbey, Dracula begins preying on women: First he feeds on Lucy Westenra, a friend of Harker's wife Mina, then he feeds on Mina. Dracula is able to shape shift to bat or mist to secretly enter the women's bedrooms at night, then preying on them and causing paralysis. Harker employs the help of Professor Van Helsing and Dr. Seward to heal both Lucy and Mina as well as devise a plan to kill Dracula.

Bram Stoker completed extensive research while he prepared the novel *Dracula*. One of Stoker's primary research notes for his novel comes from his reading William Wilkinson's 1820 book *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia*. Stoker gleans from Wilkinson that "DRACULA in Wallachian language means DEVIL" (Stoker *Bram Stoker's Notes on Dracula* 245). Stoker probably looked to Wilkinson as Wallachia borders Transylvania and was once ruled by Vlad the Impaler, whose Romanian surname was "Drăculea." This connection between Count Dracula and depictions of the devil has noteworthy implications: The same year *Dracula* was published, H.M. Doughty writes in *Gentleman's Magazine* that the "half-human Huns of Attila" were "said to be the offspring of demons and witches" (241). In this way, Stoker aligns Count Dracula's depiction as the devil is with the Huns of Attila (early invaders of Germany). In another connection between Germany and Attila, *The Review of Reviews* notes that Monsieur Thiers, President of the French Third Republic from 1871-1873, "declared [that Germany's Chancellor Bismarck] was a barbarian of the type of Attila or Genseric" (qtd. In "Character Sketch" 128).

This contest between Germany and England, and the anxieties generated around it, is subliminally captured within many elements of Dracula.

Stoker's decision to make Count Dracula's lineage aligned with that of Germany and the Huns is no accident. Magazines and newspapers of Stoker's time were filled with what I call "the rhetoric of fear" regarding Germany's desire to usurp British dominance by invading England. From periodicals like *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* to *Review of Reviews* to *The Fortnightly Review*, we see that British writers and publishers capitalized upon a language of fear to question whether England would remain the global superpower, and they used a growing vocabulary of fear as they imagined and anticipated a future war with Germany or Russia. Specifically, from the 1880s-1900s, the British media reports and rhetoric concerning Chancellor Bismarck (Chancellor from 1862-1890) and, then, Prince Wilhelm II (German Emperor and King of Prussia, 1888-1918) increased the concern that Germany intended to challenge England's global domination and maritime supremacy. Stoker was able to construct connections between Count Dracula, Attila, and Germany in his horror stories by cleverly dovetailing his own extensive research with political knowledge and rhetoric gleaned from the popular periodicals of the day to create his vampire anti-hero.

In an especially significant connection between Count Dracula and Germany, before Bram Stoker chose Transylvania as the location for Count Dracula's castle, he had written in his notes, "Lawyer's clerk—goes to Ge Styria" (Stoker *Bram Stoker's Notes on Dracula* 15); "Ge" is suspiciously the beginnings of the word "Germany," and, initially, Stoker intended the lawyer's clerk to travel to Munich for much of his adventures (Stoker *Bram Stoker's Notes on Dracula* 15). During the time Stoker researched and wrote *Dracula*, Transylvania was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany's close ally. Stoker's pairing of demons and witches with the inhabitants of Germany and Count Dracula's bloodline strongly insinuates that Count Dracula is none other than the embodiment of Germany.

I maintain that Stoker's depiction of Count Dracula hinges on a connection to the Huns, the early inhabitants of Germany. These connections are established early on in the novel: On page four, Stoker references Attila and the Huns a total of four times, and throughout the entire novel, "Huns" or "Hun" are mentioned four times and "Attila" is mentioned twice. I believe these links between Count Dracula and the Huns demonstrate Stoker's conscious intent to draw his readers' attention to the relationship between the Germans and Count Dracula.

In an 1893 article published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* A. Alison explains the tensions brewing:

No one can look carefully into the present state of Europe without feeling firmly convinced that it cannot continue long in its present condition. Every country is maintaining an armed force out of all proportion to its resources and population... The nations of Europe are, in fact, all living in a state of constant preparation for instant war... This war of giants will have Russia and France on the one side; Germany, Austria, and Italy on the other. (755-756)

This constant state of preparation not only heightened England's anxieties but most likely spurred European nations towards spending time and manpower for military preparedness. The increased military readiness speaks to British fears that England would go to war with the continent and, specifically, Germany. England's suspicion about war with Germany, a self-made rival of England, grew as Germany increased military spending. Charles Farquharson reported in 1893 that Germany spent "131 ½ millions sterling on its army and navy" from 1870-1890 (349) while England "neither ha[d] allies or armies" ("The Progress of the World" 3). And in 1898, H.W. Wilson writes in *The Fortnightly Review* that since the German Navy's inception in 1866, it had become the fourth largest in the world after England, France, and Russia (923). In addition, since 1872 Germany increased naval funding by 527 percent, and from 1881-1889, Germany had built at least 86 new ships (Wilson 923). With Germany and England jockeying for position, increasing suspicion haunted all German-English agreements.¹ Obviously, writers and publishers noticed that as the end of the nineteenth century neared, Germany became increasingly jealous of England's global hegemony and maritime supremacy. This jealousy, while not responsible for starting the war, created hatred between England and Germany resulted in the unprecedented blood-dimmed tide of trench warfare that Yeats describes.

This contest between Germany and England, and the anxieties generated around it, is subliminally captured within many elements of *Dracula*. In fact, the year of *Dracula's* publication (1897) was, in many ways, a watershed with regard to the antagonism between Germany and England. *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* asserted in September 1897 that Chancellor Bismarck's Anglophobia had lasting affects on German-English relations:

Chancellor Bismarck has long recognized what at length the people of England are beginning to understand—that in Europe there are two great, irreconcilable, opposing forces, two great nations who would make the whole world their province, and who would levy from it the tribute of commerce. England, with her long history of successful aggression...and Germany, bone of the same bone, blood with a keener intelligence, compete in every corner of the globe. ("England and Germany")

As former member of Trinity's historical society and *Halfpenny Press* part-time editor, Stoker's substantive interest in contemporary news and politics would have kept him abreast of the political storms brewing around the globe and the rhetoric used to describe them. Stoker was obviously aware of the growing jingoism within Europe, and he ingeniously manipulates and borrows from the current political tension to move *Dracula's* narrative forward. For example, Stoker cleverly chooses Transylvania for Count Dracula's castle. At the time, Transylvania was under Austro-Hungarian possession and remained until after the war in 1918, when Austro-Hungary was forced to give Transylvania back to Romania. That Transylvania was annexed to Austro-Hungary, which was in an alliance with Germany, places Count Dracula on the political side of what becomes the Central Powers when WWI erupts. Because Stoker places Count Dracula's "on the borders of ... Moldavia, and Bukovina" (Stoker *Dracula* 10), Transylvania becomes a deliberate choice to highlight and illustrate the racial and religious tensions and factions brewing within Europe. The location of Transylvania is in the middle of four nationalities: Jonathan Harker writes in his journal that there are "Saxons in the South, and mixed with them the Wallachs, who are the descendants of the Dacians; Magyars in the West, and Szekelys in the East and North" (Stoker *Dracula* 10). Transylvania's mixture of races and

religions uncannily exemplifies the forthcoming conflict among European nations, particularly Germany and England. In rhetoric similar to Stoker's, *The Review of Reviews* writes in 1891, "[I]magine this Austro-Hungarian Empire, mosaic of eighteen or twenty provinces, districts, kingdoms or duchies, in which one hostile race elbows another... Magyar and Czech, Transylvanian and Carinthian, Illyrian and Tyrolian, German and Croatian" ("The Cause of the Next Great European War" 262). Just as Count Dracula proclaims to Harker that Transylvania is "[h]ere, in the whirlpool of European races," the country's fragmented self acts as a microcosm for the fragmentation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which ruled these contentious, nebulous regions as well as for the growing European conflict (Stoker *Dracula* 33).

Not surprisingly, like the Central Powers, Stoker capitalizes upon the England's fear of war by creating an antagonist, Count Dracula, who has a penchant for invasion and terrorism. As many scholars have noted, Stoker situates Count Dracula as an invader, thus feeding off England's xenophobia. Harker notes,

[Dracula] was some little time away, and I began to look at some of the books around me. One was an atlas, which I found opened naturally at England, as if that map had been much used. On looking at it I found in certain places little rings marked, and on examining these I noticed that one was near London on the east side, manifestly where his new estate was situated; the other two were Exeter, and Whitby on the Yorkshire coast. (Stoker *Dracula* 29)

Harker does not realize when he happens upon the atlas that it reveals Count Dracula's potential points of entry into England. And just as a Field Marshall pours over maps and identifies and discerns the best points of entry, Count Dracula has done the same. Exeter, located on the River Exe, feeds into the English Channel; Whitby, on the Northeastern coast, and London, on the Thames, also feeds into the Channel, and these three locations are all points of a convenient invasion by a vampire—or a hostile army. While Stoker was not prescient, and could not assert that Germany would invade England, because Count Dracula infiltrates England via the Northeastern seaport of Whitby (a sneaky, unanticipated point of entry, to be sure) Stoker weaves into his novel the anxiety England felt regarding the possibilities of an invasion by German U-boats.

Traditionally, Count Dracula is a "drinker" of the blood of man, woman, or child. In this reading, Dracula can be regarded as the personification of war.

With Wilhelm II's naval expansion, and Count Dracula's circles on English cities, Stoker capitalizes upon the current political news and may have woven Wilhelm II's naval plans into the plot of *Dracula*. In my reading of *Dracula*, I assert that Count Dracula is a subliminal simulacra of Germany and Austro-Hungary plotting to terrorize England into submission. This fear of invasion becomes more than just an imagined, irrational anxiety when in December 1899, just two years after the publication of *Dracula*, an anonymous British Officer writes to *Contemporary Review* asserting Germany scouted England for accessible points of entry:

If we could search the archives of the Prussian General Staff in Berlin we should find that equally complete schemes are in existence, not only for war with France, but for all possible—not merely probable—wars in which Germany might be engaged. It is within my personal knowledge that a scheme exists which deals with England, and some years ago a Prussian officer known to me was investigating the roads, &c., in Yorkshire and the counties to the south which would have formed a theatre of operations in the event of a German invasion of this country from the Humber, as its immediate base. (“An Officer” 761)

This letter demonstrates a fear of German plots against England, if not against additional countries. Additionally, as seen with the advent of WWI, this fear is realized: While the war was started because of nationalistic tensions between the ethnic groups within the Austro-Hungarian empire, the war resulted in a cataclysmic fight for dominance between England and Germany.

Stoker makes the connections between Count Dracula and the Huns unavoidable because it is Count Dracula himself who proudly declares he has the blood of Attila in his veins: “Here, in the whirlpool of European races, the Ugric tribe bore down from Iceland the fighting spirit which Thor and Wodin gave them...Here, too, when they came, they found the Huns, ...What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?” (Stoker *Dracula* 34). Although speaking in Harker’s presence, Count Dracula is speaking *to himself*. This soliloquy contextualizes his thirst for global domination and serves to reveal Count Dracula’s innermost thoughts and emotions regarding his heritage—that, most importantly, he has the blood of a conqueror within his veins. Interestingly, Count Dracula does not hide his plans; he blatantly identifies himself as the enemy that is a very similar rhetorical move to the rhetoric of fear published by the English periodical presses. Count Dracula self-identifies himself as England’s foe while the periodicals use their publications to identify Germany as England’s rival. By pairing Count Dracula with the bloody legacy of Attila and the Huns, who were early inhabitants of Germany (Doughty 238), this novel creates another link between Count Dracula’s attacks on England, and thus uncannily foreshadows English fears of a future assault by Germany.



Figure 1. Illustration by Pepper Tharp.

Stoker’s obvious links between Count Dracula with Attila the Hun, especially so early in the novel, capitalized upon the fear of an Attila the Hun-like invasion.² A 1893 review of Mr. E. Douglas Fawcett’s “Hartmann the Anarchist” published in *The Review of Review* “describes how London was destroyed by a flying machine [called The Attila] which showered dynamite bombs, shot and shell, and blazing petroleum from the clouds” (“How London Was Destroyed” 280) his story furthers the British fears of invasion and anxieties in epic, unstoppable proportions. Like “The Attila” machine raining blazing petroleum upon the Londoners below, WWI warfare would see the use of mustard and poison gas on victims—modern warfare in direct opposition to the rules of war.

Similar to the flying destroyer machine in Fawcett’s story or *Edinburgh Review*’s Destroyer Angel, Count Dracula is an impermeable force that can travel by air or by mist (possibly a

prescient foreshadowing of mustard gas) to reach his next victims. This ability to move and travel in unconventional ways only heightens the fear Count Dracula creates wherever he goes and subliminally heralds the unparalleled warfare waged during WWI. In abstract terms, the Dracula myths tell of a blood-thirsty vampire roaming the globe for his next victim.

Traditionally, Count Dracula is an indiscriminate “drinker” of the blood of man, woman, or child. In this reading, Dracula can be regarded as the personification of war. Just as Count Dracula feeds on people, and ingests the lives (e.g. blood) of various peoples and groups, so, too, does war feed off people: Like Count Dracula, war leaves death and destruction wherever it goes. As well, whenever war travels, and blood is spilled, it intermingles and converges with the blood of the dead. Thus, Count Dracula’s very *being* is a cesspool of mixed blood from the Carpathians, Magyars, Germans, Styrians, and Transylvanians, in addition to peoples from around the globe. The (life) blood Count Dracula consumes makes him a walking grave, and Stoker’s brilliant novel not only refers to all the peoples who had died in wars throughout Eastern Europe’s history but also intuitively a terrifying image of what was to come in WWI.

In Dracula’s rabid need for blood, we witness the full extent of English anxieties in which Germany’s craving for imperial expansion at the end of the nineteenth century results in the devastation and a loss of innocence in the English consciousness. W.B. Yeats’ “The Second Coming” accurately describes the fears the continent experiences pre and post-WWI: In addition to the blood-dimmed tides erupting with WWI, they also erupt when Count Dracula unleashes his blood-craving terrorism on the world. When he wrote “The Second Coming” in 1919 he was clearly reeling from the aftermath of the First World War. As Yeats so clearly states, WWI caused anarchy to be loosed upon the world, and the world was submerged in a blood-dimmed tide of bodies and destruction. Likewise, with the creation of Count Dracula, Stoker constructs a modern enemy who wreaks death and destruction upon England just as Germany threatens to do during the late nineteenth century; this fear is realized in the early twentieth century with the culmination of WWI. Frighteningly, Count Dracula’s tactics would prove all too familiar for the novel’s twentieth and twenty-first century readership.

Notes

¹ See “The Fleet and Anglo-German Relations: Rear Admiral Tirpitz to Admiral von Stosch” (February 13, 1896),

< http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=791>.

² See Charles Dickens’ “Attila in London” (1866) in *All the Year Round* about how capitalism is turning Londoners into modern day Attilas.

Works Cited

- Alison, A. "Armed Europe: How Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. 154:938 (Dec. 1893): 755-756. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 10 April 2009.
- An Officer. "The Government and the War." *Contemporary Review*. 76 (Dec. 1899): 761-774. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 11 April 2009.
- "The Cause of the Next Great European War." *The Review of Reviews*. 4:21 (Sept. 1891): 261-262. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 10 April 2009.
- "Character Sketch." *The Review of Reviews*. (Aug. 1898): 125-135. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 10 April 2009.
- Doughty, H.M. "Drenthe and the Huns." *Gentleman's Magazine*. 283:2001 (Sept. 1897): 233-247. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 9 April 2009.
- "England and Germany." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. 84:2185 (Sept. 1897): 278-279. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 15 April 2009.
- Evans, A. Eubule. "Germany Under the Empire." *Contemporary Review*. 69 (Feb. 1896): 167-177. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 15 April 2009.
- Farquharson, Charles Donald. "Federation: The Polity of the Future." *Westminster Review*. 139:1 (Jan. 1893): 349-362. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 8 April 2009.
- Farrer, J.A. "The Laws of War." *Gentleman's Magazine*. 253:1819 (July 1882): 13-28. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 9 April 2009.
- Greenwood, Frederick. "Britain 'Fin de Siècle'." *Contemporary Review*. 58 (Aug. 1890): 297-312. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 14 April 2009.
- Lawson, W.R. "German Intrigues in the Transvaal." *Contemporary Review* 69 (Feb. 1896): 292-305. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 13 April 2009.
- Ludlam, Harry. *A Biography of Dracula: The Life Story of Bram Stoker*. London and New York: W. Foulsham & Co. LTD. for The Fireside Press, 1962.
- "The Progress of the World." *The Review of Reviews*. 17 (Jan. 1898): 3-10. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 10 April 2009.
- "Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire, Article VII.-1." *Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal*. 190:389 (July 1899): 170-190. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 11 April 2009.
- Saunders, George. *The Last of the Huns*. London: Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1914.
- Schmitt, Bernadotte. *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1934.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Eds. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997.

Bram Stoker's Notes on Dracula: A Facimile Edition. Annotated and Transcribed by Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller. North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008.

"Necessity for Political Honesty." *College Historical Society*. Dublin: James Charles & Son, 1872.

"The War Scare." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. 84:2200 (Dec. 1897): 736-737. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 9 April 2009.

Wilson, H.W. "The Naval and Colonial Policy of Germany." *The Fortnightly Review*. 61:366 (June 1898): 923-935. *British Periodicals*. University of New Mexico Lib., NM. Web. 10 April 2009.

Yeats, W.B. "The Second Coming." *The Literature Network*. 2009. 10 May 2009. <
<http://www.online-literature.com/yeats/780/>>.

Copyright @ 2011 Genesee M. Carter

At the time of this article's publication Genesee Carter was a doctoral student studying rhetoric, writing, and Nineteenth-Century British Literature at the University of New Mexico. She now serves as the Associate Director of Composition at Colorado State University. Her research agenda explores the ways in which curriculum, outcomes, and program development impact student learning and instructors' professional development. Her current research, which focuses on kairos and rhetorical agency, seeks to better understand the relationship between multimodal pedagogy, digital literacies, and posthumanism.